

USDA Commemorates the 79th Birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

On January 16, 2008, USDA commemorated the 79th birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at a celebration held in USDA's Jefferson Auditorium in Washington, DC. Each year, USDA employees come together to pay tribute to Dr. King through programs that generate a spirit of unity and service. Sponsored by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of Diversity, these annual celebrations are intended to raise awareness of the important contributions made by Dr. King, and highlight the value that USDA places on diversity. This year's celebration was themed "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr: The Man and Legacy You Never Knew!" Mr. Royce Kinniebrew, founder of the Kinniebrew Group, provided the keynote address.

Mr. Carl-Martin Ruiz, Director, Office of Outreach and Diversity, introduced Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Margo M. McKay. Citing the following quote from Dr. King, "We may have all come from different ships, but we're in the same boat now," Ms. McKay reminded the audience of the principles of diversity and inclusion and its role in helping USDA achieve its mission. Expanding on the theme of diversity, Assistant Secretary Margo McKay further reminded the audience that, "All of us here at USDA have come here from different places and different backgrounds. But, let's remember that we are all working together towards the same mission."

After being introduced by Assistant Secretary McKay, the Secretary's Chief of Staff Dale Moore welcomed the audience of over 400 USDA employees to the celebration of Dr. King's birthday.

Following an introduction by Ms. Elaine Ho, Director, Office of Diversity, Mr. Kinniebrew in his keynote address, presented a more personable aspect of Dr. King's life and background than what is normally highlighted. For example, he explained that Dr. King had originally planned to deliver a different speech at the "March on Washington" in August 1963. Mr. Kinniebrew stated that in the middle of his address, Dr. King departed from his text at the encouragement of gospel singer Mahalia Jackson to "tell them about the dream!" Dr. King proceeded to deliver his "I Have A Dream" speech, which he had recently presented in Detroit, Michigan, on June 28, 1963.